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Department/Embassy Briefing/Assistance to Codel Ryan

Beginning September 15 when Congressman Ryan met with Assistant Secretary Vaky and members of his staff, the Department and our Embassy in Guyana actively assisted Congressman Ryan. The Guyana Desk Officer, as well as members of the Offices of Special Consular Officers and Assistant Legal Adviser for Consular Affairs, were involved from October 15 on in frequent consultations with the Codel. The purpose of the briefings was to acquaint the Codel with as much information as possible, available to the Department, concerning the background of the Peoples Temple, its probable reaction to the visit, and the serious logistical problems involved in the trip up to Jonestown.

Specifica , the Department took the position that the Codel should visit the community only with the concurrence of the Peoples Temple since to do otherwise would undoubtably raise suspicions and anx ties, and would most likely result in the Codel being refused access to the community. The Department also believed that, unless the Peoples Temple agreed, no members of the press

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should accompany the Codel nor should there be any private citizens with the Codel since the purpose of the visit was an official inquiry into conditions at the site as part of Congressman Ryan's responsibility to his constituents.

The alleged illegal activities of the People's Temple were discussed. A Department officer recommended that the Congressman take a trained clinical psychiatrist with him in order to study the situation at Jonestown and evaluate charges of brainwashing. However they were not discussed in the context of the possibility of an attack on the Codel.

Members of the Codel, including Congressman Ryan himself, appeared to accept the suggestions and indicated they clearly understood the problems that could arise from the visit. Subsequently, however, he apparently decided to take a news team with him, to allow concerned friends and relatives to accompany the party as far as Georgetown, and not to take a clinical psychiatrist with him. These actions suggest that, if there was some concern on the part of members of the Codel over just what might occur, no one had reason to anticipate the likelihood of the tragedy that actually happened.

It was obvious from the very beginning that Congressman Ryan and his staff were aware of the nature of the Peoples Temple based upon the Congressman's own exhaustive four year investigation including interviews with relatives of members and former members of the organization. The Congressman believed strongly that constituents and other American citizens were being mistreated. He said he had no fault to find with the handling of the matter to date, but he considered that he was in a position to bring more pressure to bear on the Temple than could U.S. government officials.

In addition, there were two meetings just prior to Congressman Ryan's departure. Thursday, March 9 the Congressman's legal aide and a member of the staff of the House International Relations Committee met with representatives of the Office of Caribbean Affairs, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Legal Advisor's Office to discuss legal aspects bearing on the Congressional visit. The principal

points of discussion were: Privacy Act implications concerning the Congressional Committee's right to information and access to individuals and their files; any other perogatives that the committee might be entitled to by treaty or international comity; and privileges available under the Vienna Consular Convention and the 1951 bilateral Consular Convention in force. The logistical problems to be faced in making the trip to Jonestown were thoroughly discussed. There was also general discussion concerning the personality and psychological aspects of mind control techniques concerning religious groups of this type, including the difficulty in determining when an individual wished to leave the group despite statements to the contrary.

On Monday, November 13, Congressman Ryan accompanied by his legal aide and two members of the House International Relations Committee staff met with officers from the Office of Caribbean Affairs, Bureau of Consular Affairs, and Legal Advisors Office. Accompanying Congressman Ryan were Mrs. Debbie Blakely, a former member and resident of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown,

Grace Stoen, also a former member of the Peoples Temple, and a plaintiff in an action against Jim Jones for the custody of her son, John Victor Stoen, and Steven Katsaris of the "Concerned Relatives" group whose daughter, Mary, was then living in Jonestown. The main purpose of this meeting was for Department's officers to have the opportunity to listen to the "Concerned Relatives" and the Congressman with regard to conditions in Jonestown and the attraction that the Peoples Temple and its founder, Jim Jones, had for enlisting dedicated followers.

At the end of the meeting, the Congressman said that he owed it to his constituents and the other Congressman in the San Francisco Bay area to visit Jonestown to discover the true nature of operation. He expressed a personal commitment to Americans who were becoming unknowning victims of the Peoples Temple and other similar religious groups.

In Guayana our Embassy obtained permission for the visit from both the Guyanese Government and the Peoples Temple, met and assisted Congressman Ryan and his party in making their transportation arrangements, and briefed them on the current situation as the Embassy understood it. Congressman Ryan was the houseguest of our Ambassador during his stay, and the Deputy Chief of Mission, Richard Dwyer, was assigned to accompany the party to Jonestown. After the attack on Congressman Ryan and the party, Mr. Dwyer, although wounded himself, took charge of the situation and was tireless in his efforts to protect the members of the party and look after the wounded.

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